

STANFORD RESEARCH CENTER
6 1958-1-15-58
April 1958

RESEARCH SERVICES FOR THE
WASHINGTON STATE WORLD FAIR COMMISSION

Memorandum Report No. 4
SRI Project No. I-2321

Prepared for:

Washington State World Fair Commission
Seattle, Washington

Approved:

William S. Royce
William S. Royce, Manager
Pacific Northwest Office

Paul J. Lovewell
Paul J. Lovewell
Director of Economics Research

Section I

INTRODUCTION

In September, 1957, Stanford Research Institute began the first of several research tasks for the State of Washington World Fair Commission. In subsequent months, reports were submitted covering the financial aspects of certain previous world fairs, as well as possible attendance, under various conditions, for a "massive fete" to be presented at Seattle, commencing 1961.

Conclusions of Preceding Studies

Major conclusions of Tasks 1 through 3 were as follows:

- a. Large deficits typify world fairs presented since the 1930's. New York (1939-1940) and San Francisco (1939-1940) showed deficits (\$18.6 million and \$9.1 million, respectively) even after two years of operation. Chicago, after two years (1933-1934) had the unusual experience of showing a net profit of approximately \$688,000, of which \$160,000 was ultimately distributed to charities.
- b. Operating profits were realized before amortization of construction costs. For example, the New York Fair showed a profit on operations of \$12.8 million, and San Francisco almost \$7 million.
- c. Final deficits for the New York and San Francisco fairs are explained principally by two factors: excessive construction costs and insufficient attendance. Attendance forecasts for New York and San Francisco were based unrealistically on previous world fair results, and consequently were overly optimistic. In addition, the economic cycle turned up in 1939, causing costs to exceed estimated amounts.
- d. The attendance and the operating profit are highest during the first year of a world fair. Returns decline thereafter, and in order to recover the total costs, including construction, approximately four or five years of profitable operations would probably be necessary.

- e. Some fairs or entertainment centers are planned as permanent projects. Though world fairs typically are planned for one year (and are often extended for a second season), other approaches are possible: for example, Disneyland, the Inter-American Center at Miami, Florida (which is to be a "permanent world fair"), or the State Fair of Texas, which is a year-round operation, featuring several museums, football games, exhibits, amusements, etc.
- f. Attendance is related principally to local and regional population and also to the number of tourists in the area. Assuming a proficiently staged event, a greater attendance would occur in a city like Chicago (because of the surrounding population and number of tourists) than in Denver, for example. A massive fete in 1961 at Seattle might draw 8 to 12 million admittances. If a permanent entertainment and civic center is developed, annual admissions should grow from roughly 3 million during 1962 to 5 million by 1965.

In addition to these major conclusions, certain observations were informally reported to the State of Washington World Fair Commission in regard to (a) the possible role of television as it relates to the successful operation of a major exposition, (b) possible attitudes of potential industrial exhibitors, and (c) the great complexity of obtaining foreign participation.

The Current Task

After considering the information presented in the reports on Tasks 1 to 3, members of the State of Washington World Fair Commission expressed interest in examining alternative, contemporary concepts for a major exposition, departing from conventional world fair characteristics to avoid obvious risks, and to exploit current opportunities as much as possible. One such concept was tentatively described as a permanent entertainment and cultural center, offering a variety of facilities and activities within a beautifully appointed site located near the center of Washington's largest city, Seattle.

Task 4, therefore, was outlined as follows: to seek information that would assist in determining the kind of theme or objective which would (a) arouse a desire among people of the community and the nation to visit and support such a center; (b) effectively integrate a variety of entertainment, recreational, cultural, and educational events and programs; and (c) permit a permanent plan of operation characterized by constantly fresh and changing attractions and subthemes.

Method of Approach

Meetings were held by a member of the Institute with individuals selected as being uniquely aware of or interested in the current and developing tastes of the public. (See Appendix A for list of individuals selected.)

The interviews occurred in Chicago, New York, Washington, D. C., Miami, Dallas, San Diego, Los Angeles, Palo Alto, and Portland.

Individuals interviewed could be classified as one of the following:

1. An administrator of a project somewhat similar to the one proposed by the State of Washington World Fair Commission.
2. An executive of a company or institution related to the entertainment industry.
3. A consultant, author, or sociologist experienced in the field of leisure or entertainment.

Because of the rich experiences and knowledge represented by each person interviewed, the approach used was to seek the summary of each one's views. This was accomplished by lengthy but informal discussions. Stated differently, no attempt was made by the Institute to compile or undertake original research studies, but rather to obtain the conclusions from those whose careers offered constant and first-hand exposure to significant studies or trends as related to the various problems involved in Task 4.

This research was conducted by the Pacific Northwest Office of Stanford Research Institute under the administrative direction of William S. Royce. Richard H. Raymond was project leader. Other staff members assisting included Charles L. Hamman, Assistant Director of the Economics Division for Area Development Research; James R. Lee, Manager of Economics Research for the Southern California Laboratories; Maurice Rappaport, Coordinator of Applied Behavioral Sciences Research; Sidney Art, James H. Forbes, and James Thompson, of the Southern California Laboratories; and Dorothy Stewart. Particular thanks are due to Ewen C. Dingwall, Project Director, and the staffs of the Washington State World Fair Commission and Seattle Civic Center Commission, for their guidance and furnishing of local information. The major contributors to this report were the leaders in cultural and entertainment fields without whose cooperation in granting interviews and sharing of creative ideas this report would not be possible.

Section II

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

There is a generally shared belief that Americans are noticeably better educated, more interested in the world about them, and better able to pursue their interests today than in previous decades. As R. L. Thornton, mayor of Dallas and President of the State Fair of Texas, summarized it, "There are no more yokels in America."

The outlook for the next several decades, as indicated by most of those interviewed, is for an increasing interest on the part of Americans in self-improvement, more mature forms of leisure activity, better quality of entertainment, and "well-rounded" experiences.

As an adjunct to this view, there was an eager enthusiasm generally for the State of Washington's suggested plan of a multipurpose center for recreation, entertainment, and culture. And in contrast, there was noticeable coolness to "another world fair."

On Choosing a Theme

The following opinions summarize specifically the most significant findings of the study relative to selecting a suitable objective or theme.

- a. A broad over-all objective and changing, timely subthemes.
The over-all objective should reflect the integrity and high purpose of those who plan and those who attend the center. It is used more for policy-making purposes than for advertising and publicity. The subthemes should be timely, personal, dramatic--capturing the imaginations of attendees--and especially interesting to local residents.
- b. Versatility and flexibility. The impact of the "era of leisure" is just beginning to be felt. In the years to come, our living habits and the products we consume will undergo further vast changes. In providing entertainment to people of such changing tastes and habits, physical structures should accommodate a variety of events, or else ^{1/} should be capable of being easily redesigned or replaced.

^{1/} Except for certain attractions that are accepted as traditional, such as symphony, opera, or legitimate theater.

- c. Variety ("well-roundedness"). As the publishers of Life and also the producers of the televised Lowell Thomas series stated: "We believe our audience consists of people who want to be well-rounded." There seems to be an extremely wide interest range among people of this country, whether they are considered individually or as a group. A large-scale entertainment center should attempt to offer attractions in a wide variety of interest fields.
- d. Educational content. Attendance has been growing remarkably at so-called cultural attractions (zoos, museums, story-land parks, concerts, etc.). Showmen and sociologists alike urge that educational subjects and techniques be made more a part of entertainment.
- e. Live personalities. Personal appearance tours have not declined in popularity because of movies, television, or any "mechanical" entertainment medium. In fact, there is an increasing need for large-scale facilities to permit famous stars, troupes, and live attractions to be presented in person to living audiences.
- f. Participative recreation. Industrial exhibitors are placing increasing emphasis on exhibits that move or that can be manipulated by attendees. Static exhibits, like those so often found in museums, are declining in popularity. Several leading museums are, in fact, abandoning old-fashioned methods of presenting exhibits and are achieving new heights of attendance because of the "entertaining qualities" of their dynamic exhibits. ^{1/}
- g. Family fun. Amusement parks, drive-in theaters, parks, and even shopping centers are recognizing the importance of serving the entire family. Considerable evidence exists to confirm the wisdom of planning entertainment accordingly--one dramatic example being Disneyland.

^{1/} The Chicago Museum of Science and Industry, which attracted nearly 3,000,000 people in 1957, was the second most popular recreational attraction in Chicago. It was surpassed only by the Lincoln Park Zoo. The Boston Science Museum is also attaining remarkable success through its emphasis on dynamic, participative attractions.

- h. Community fun. In the final analysis, success for a world fair or community entertainment project is determined by the extent to which people in the surrounding region (within a day's drive roughly) enjoy attending. Tourists and other visitors are attracted to "where the fun is going on." The theme, accordingly, should by all means appeal to the residents of Washington or the Pacific Northwest.

A host of observations were made in addition to the above, and most are discussed more fully in later sections of this report. (See Appendix B for summaries of all interviews.)

Emerging from the numerous and diverse views and facts is this apparent consensus on choosing a theme:

There is more to be known about the world in which we live than we dare dream of. Man's desire and capacity to explore these fields of knowledge are increasing constantly. And his interest is not in just the gadgetry of the world, but rather history, science, art--in the broadest possible meaning of those terms. "To provide an exciting, attractive center for people to have a varied exposure to the many dramatic aspects of the world's history--its science--and its art" would seem to be a broad objective with almost limitless possibilities. Within such a broad objective, a theme appealing to the citizens of the region, reflecting their character and resources and interests, might then be developed under the thoughtful direction of the community's leaders.